DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 958 CE 057 777

TITLE	Champions of Literacy 1991.
INSTITUTION	Royce and Royce, Lancaster, PA.
SPONS AGENCY	Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg. Div. of Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs.
PUB DATE	91
NOTE	55p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Career Development; Case Studies; Educationally Disadvantaged; Mathematics Skills; Reading Skills; *Success
IDENTIFIERS	*Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

The stories of 10 outstanding Pennsylvania men and women in this booklet illustrate the determination of educationally disadvantaged people to overcome insurmountable obstacles. They were aided in their successful struggles to enhance their reading and math skills as well as their careers by their participation in various adult basic education and literacy programs throughout Pennsylvania. The 10 people represented various counties in Pennsylvania: (1) Donna Smith, Allegheny County; (2) Donald Zeigler, Berks County; (3) Dawn Yates, Bradford County; (4) Carmen Harvison, Lebanon County; (5) Deborah Holmes, Montgomery County; (6) Michael Murray, Montgomery County; (7) Vincent Luettgen, Northampton County; (8) Darling Gregory, Philadelphia County; (9) Steven Parker, Philadelphia County; and (10) Patricia Williams, Susquehanna County. (NLA)

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DIVISION OF
ADULT BASIC AND LITERACY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
HONORS OUTSTANDING
ADULT STUDENTS
IN SUCCESS STORIES

CHAMPIONS

of Literacy 1991

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Champions of Literacy

1991

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Dear Reader:

In *Success Stories: Champions of Literacy*, you will read the inspiring stories of ten outstanding Pennsylvania men and women who serve as a living testament to the triumph of the human spirit over seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They were aided in their successful struggles to enhance their reading and math skills as well as in their careers, by their participation in various adult basic education and literacy programs throughout our Commonwealth. The perseverance and hope demonstrated by these courageous adults is truly moving.

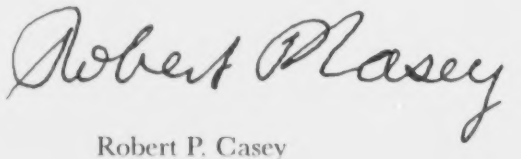
Mrs. Casey and I have been strongly supportive of adult basic education efforts in our state. Over the past four years, we've backed up that support with an historic state investment in adult literacy programs. We are convinced that it takes this kind of educational commitment to ensure that every citizen of our state has the opportunity to reach their highest potential in life.

Nothing is more essential to the future competitiveness of our economy and the vitality of our society than the education of our people. When people cannot read, they cannot participate fully in their work places or their communities. And we all suffer because of it.

That's why it's so important for all of us to support efforts to improve literacy in our state. State government will continue its financial and moral commitment. But our success depends on the active involvement of everyone who cares about our future as a state and as a people.

I hope that *Success Stories: Champions of Literacy* will inspire all of us to help bring the joys of literacy and life-long learning to every Pennsylvanian.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey
Governor,
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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DONNA SMITH:

People should not give up their hopes and dreams.

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Donna Smith had to overcome many obstacles to become a leader among adult learners. She dropped out of school at seventeen after repeating ninth grade. Many subjects were too hard for her because she didn't read well. She didn't realize the importance of an education, and so she decided to leave school and get a job. Then, in January 1988, Donna was attending a party for her fiance and friends. They started to play a game called "Win, Lose or Draw." She couldn't read the cards and was embarrassed to tears. No one at the party knew about her reading problem.

Deciding tc improve her skills, Donna enrolled in the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council's tutoring program. Since March 1988, she has reached many milestones in using reading and writing. As treasurer of her labor union, she learned to read and follow instructions in the treasurer's manual. She can now read a letter of recommendation from a former employer and understand information on health insurance. She can read instructions on her medication. She wrote a letter of complaint to a car dealership and another letter to a bill collector asking for an explanation of late charges.

Attendance has not been easy. Donna has recovered from a mastectomy, had plastic surgery following a car accident, and is receiving therapy for pain management following a severe back injury suffered at work. She has helped two family members through serious illnesses. In addition, Donna has held one or two part-time jobs plus a full-time job. In spite of all this, she always comes to class with homework done. On numerous occasions she has thought up extra assignments for added practice. In addition to being tutored in basic reading and writing, sheenrolled in math, spelling, and job preparation classes. Her goal is to pass the GED and enter training for hospital work. She feels that she has a special calling to care for sick people.

In the past two years, Donna has been very active in promoting literacy and has received a local award for her efforts. She made an advertisement for cable television. She was interviewed and photographed for an article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, which drew new students and volunteers to the program. She met with foundation leaders to encourage literacy funding and with literacy students to discuss student leadership. As a member of the planning committee for the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council's 1990 recognition event, Donna called students and board members to encourage participation, and was one of the principal speakers at the event.

ALLEGHENY COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council*
SPONSOR: *Donald G. Block*

DONALD E. ZEIGLER, JR.

If you're not working, you have time to learn.

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Donald Zeigler is a twenty-four year old man living alone in Reading, PA. He attends Reading Area Community College three days a week and hopes to find employment in a data-entry position after additional schooling and training.

Don had a parochial school education through sixth grade. In seventh grade, when he entered public school, things began to fall apart. He became discouraged with his "C" and "D" grades. With no encouragement to stay in school from his family, teachers or counselors, he quit in the middle of his junior year.

Don worked locally for a tree trimming company and then moved on to a larger, national firm. He was stationed in Berks County in October of 1986 when he suffered a devastating accident. He fell forty feet from a tree, striking his head, and remained comatose for three months. The right side of his face and skull were crushed, and he suffered left side paralysis and a dislocated right knee. He is nearly deaf in his right ear and has no left eye peripheral vision.

His injuries were addressed via fifteen surgeries and a long stay at the Reading Rehabilitation Hospital and the Beechwood Rehabilitation Center in Langhorne, PA. Don proved invaluable to the staff at Beechwood because he was able to encourage and inspire other head trauma patients. The staff used him night and day to intervene for them when other patients refused to communicate.

When Don was discharged, no one expected him to be able to live alone. He has proven them wrong. He maintains his own apartment, shops for groceries, and cooks for himself.

At the suggestion of a speech therapist at Beechwood, Don decided to look into additional schooling. In October 1989, he enrolled in a GED class at the Reading Area Community College. Attending in a wheelchair until the last surgical casts were removed, he missed only those days when his cast was removed and when he came down with a severe case of the flu. He was an inspiration to his classmates, never complaining about his situation and always encouraging them to try their hardest to overcome adversity. Don passed his GED in June of 1990 on his first try. He is now attending classes at a local community college, traveling by bus from his apartment and then walking to class with the assistance of a cane.

Don Zeigler is a member of a support group called Helping Wheels. His words to other handicapped people who complain about their situation is: "If you're not working, you have time to learn."

BERKS COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Reading Area Community College*
SPONSOR: *Ann Papada and Mary Schmidt*

Champions of Literacy
1991

DAWN S. YATES

I see getting
my GED
as the first step
which will allow me
to go on.

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Dawn Yates left school near the end of her tenth year without taking her final exams. She was bored with school and wanted to be a wife and mother. She was pregnant and did not feel that her school was supportive. Dawn's child had special needs and she dedicated her life to helping him become all he could be. She spent many months teaching him to do things for himself. She also worked part-time for her husband's employer to bring in a little more money.

When Dawn entered the Bradford County Action Literacy Program, she was shy and unsure of herself. She had no belief in her academic ability, little self-esteem, and no confidence in her decision-making skills. She did not see that what she had done for her son and herself had any value.

Dawn also had many problems with transportation. She had an unreliable car that would often have to be fixed before she could leave school to return home. Her husband could not help with car maintenance and gas money because his income barely covered their household expenses. She worked more hours at her part-time job to earn money to fix the car.

Although her husband did not believe she would complete the program, Dawn's confidence grew as she found herself in leadership roles in the classroom. The other students looked to her for help with academic problems and personal matters. She always had time to talk to anyone who needed her. She passed the GED with a very high score and applied to Mansfield University's Act 101 Program. She was accepted in the fall of 1988.

Dawn is now a junior, having completed 73 credits. She will graduate in 1991 with a Bachelor of Social Work degree, and plans to work as a children's counselor. She feels her experience in dealing with her son's needs has prepared her for this field. She is currently involved in the Social Work Club, the Non-Traditional Students Association, and the Act 101 Peer Counseling program. She is a 4-H parent and assists the 4-H club as a volunteer, all in addition to working part-time for her husband's employer.

Dawn continues to visit the Bradford County Action Literacy Program and talk with current students. She shares her experiences with them and has been an inspirational graduation speaker. She encourages others to attend adult education classes and tells them how adult education has helped her. She has been an exceptional role model and has achieved more than she ever dreamed of being able to try.

BRADFORD COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Bradford County Action, Inc.*
SPONSOR: *Joyce Kerrick*

Champions of Literacy
1991

CARMEN HARVISON

Don't tell me
I can't!

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Carmen Harvison has led a life which would cause many weaker people to give up their hopes and dreams. However, living by her motto "Don't tell me I can't," she has taken her bad experiences and has learned and grown from them.

Carmen developed rheumatic fever at age seven and suffered from a host of related illnesses. As a teenager, she spent six months in a wheelchair. Although her doctors believed she would never walk again, her "Don't tell me I can't" attitude brought her through. To enrich her blood, her mother gave her a wine and egg drink. When Carmen realized alcohol would cover her pain, it became an important part of her life. In 1979, Carmen committed herself to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation hospital and has been free of abuse problems ever since.

There was another reason Carmen became addicted to alcohol. When she was fourteen and in eighth grade, Carmen's parents took her out of school. Having her home meant having a "live-in maid and a second wife." During a period of several years, Carmen was sexually abused by both her stepfather and a family friend. At seventeen, she became pregnant in an effort to escape her stepfather's abuse. When the baby's father wanted her to have an abortion, Carmen married another man. After fourteen years of marriage and five children, she and her husband divorced. At thirty-one, she married a twenty-four year old. She compares this marriage to "raising someone else's kid." She is currently in her third marriage and is finally happy.

Carmen realized that she had to join the workforce in order to make a life for herself. This meant getting an education. After giving her psychological tests, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation recommended that she not pursue the GED. Although they declared that she was not "teachable," Carmen began the GED program at the Lebanon Adult Education Center in 1986. At that time, her divorce and other legal problems made it difficult for her to concentrate on her schooling. In 1989, she returned to her studies and received her GED in 1990.

Carmen is proud of her accomplishments. She relates her experiences to others and promotes the GED program. Her future plans include further education. She would like to be a counselor and "give back what I've been given." However, another obstacle stands in her path. According to an aptitude test given by a local job training program, Carmen did not score well enough to qualify for financial aid from them. Her answer to this newest barrier is "Don't tell me I can't."

LEBANON COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Lebanon Adult Center*
SPONSOR: *Kathleen Davies and Louise Miller*

Champions of Literacy
1991

DEBORAH HOLMES

Strive to be number one!

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Five years ago, when Deborah Holmes entered Eagleville Hospital seeking treatment for a ten year addiction to drugs and alcohol, she was completely demoralized. "I'm gonna die or I'm gonna get help," she told the counselor.

Debbie grew up in a family where her brothers and sisters, as well as both parents, abused alcohol. When she was six, two of her brothers drowned, and at the age of seven she was assaulted by a friend her father brought home. At the age of fifteen, Debbie was traumatized by the murders of her sister-in-law and niece.

Despite all this she continued to attend school and participate in sports. Then, when she was seventeen, her world began to fall apart. Cut from varsity basketball and pregnant as well, a very angry, frustrated, and saddened Debbie dropped out of school. As her ability to cope began to falter, she started using drugs and alcohol.

By the age of twenty-one, Debbie had married, divorced, and given birth to three children. The relationship with her husband had been physically and mentally abusive. When her father died from cancer and her mother succumbed to a heart attack, she gave way to depression and was hospitalized. Her children were taken away and lost to her for seven years. After three attempts to rehabilitate herself, Debbie entered Eagleville Hospital's rehabilitation program.

As she moved through treatment, Debbie started attending school. The product of a deprived and degraded background, she brought a minimal fund of knowledge to the classroom. But she did have determination. Despite difficulties in math, she quietly resolved to get well, get her children, get an education, and then focus on helping women like herself.

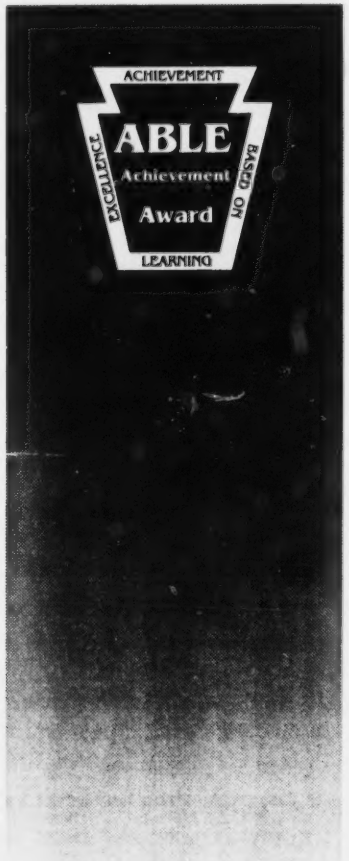
Debbie left treatment five years ago, having attained her GED. She now has her three children back with her and is giving them stability, love and a role model. A student at Montgomery County Community College, she is working toward an associate degree in human services.

Debbie is involved in her community. She is treasurer of the Human Service Club at the college and, as a member of the Montgomery County Service Club, goes into Philadelphia to work with the homeless. She also finds time to volunteer at Laurel House in Norristown, a shelter for abused women. Debbie Holmes is looking forward to completing her two-year degree, earning a B.A., and then opening a women's house for women like herself who need support after treatment.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Eagleville Hospital*
SPONSOR: *Kathleen Marks*

Champions of Literacy
1991

MICHAEL S. MURRAY



Dare yourself
to be great.
The education is
out there;
go get it.

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Michael Murray left school in the tenth grade. His parents were dead and he was an older child caught up in the foster care system. Although he felt Mrs. Williams, his foster mother, really cared for him, Michael knew that he must soon be on his own. He accepted a maintenance job and moved into a group home at the Philadelphia YMCA.

Many people noticed in Michael the desire to better himself. Patrons of the YMCA encouraged him to get more training. From 1971 to 1973, he attended a construction trades school to become skilled in building maintenance and painting. For several years he supported himself as a painter, but Michael faced a growing problem. Once alcohol had been a source of relaxation and comfort; now he realized that he could no longer control his drinking.

After conquering his dependency, Michael was ready to make a new start. In August 1988 he enrolled in the ABE/GED program at the Montgomery County OIC. He worked hard to improve his reading comprehension, math and English skills. A major setback occurred when he was sentenced to jail for unpaid parking tickets that had accumulated during his addiction. At the same time, he was battling another foe: epilepsy. Even with medication, Michael frequently had petit mal seizures. These affected his writing, and some days it was very difficult for him to learn. Michael just kept trying, and in May 1990 he received his GED.

With his first goals attained, he transferred to another school to study computers. The staff there was concerned about Michael's epilepsy, so he again turned to the OIC. Michael is currently enrolled in a typing class at the center to gain enough speed to enter OIC's computer class. He is confident that a good job in the computer field is waiting for him when he completes his training.

Michael Murray is grateful for the help he has received and constantly tries to help others. He attended the Montgomery County Opportunity Board's "Self Esteem Class" and now volunteers to help others who are enrolled there. He writes inspirational poetry and frequently contributes to the "Poet's Corner" in the *Norristown Times Herald*. He serves as a Board Member for the Legal Aid Society, and has been nominated for a Governor's Award by the local SPOC program. He was the 1990 Student Speaker at Montgomery County OIC's Annual Fund Raising Dinner. Although he takes life one day at a time, it is obvious to all that he has a bright future.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Montgomery County OIC*
SPONSOR: *Dr. Frank Fair*

Champions of Literacy
1991

VINCENT LUETTGEN

ACHIEVEMENT
ABLE
Achievement
Award
EXCELLENCE
BASED ON
LEARNING

Through the literacy program, I have learned to read big words and write small letters.

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During the Depression, Vincent Luettgen attended six different schools as his father traveled in search of work. He left school in seventh grade because his help was also needed to support the family. Years later, when he was visiting a former teacher, she reminded him that he was always asleep in class, exhausted from too many hours of work.

Despite his lack of formal education, Vince's strong desire to learn helped him in later life. For twenty-four years, he worked as a truck mechanic, relying on his memory to repair parts because the manuals were too difficult for him to read. When in doubt, he would ask someone, a tactic that enabled him to gain much of the mechanical knowledge he has.

After a back injury forced him to quit working as a mechanic; Vincent still wasn't ready to retire. The Green Thumb federal job program for older citizens led him to an opening at the Bangor Public Library. That was fourteen years ago. Over the years, Vince has processed thousands of books. He was always interested in what patrons were reading. He also harbored a secret desire to improve his reading skills in order to enjoy newspapers and biographies.

Two years ago, when a literacy program began in the Bangor-Pen Argyl area, Vince asked to be matched with a tutor. This seventy-year old student, who never learned to print lower case letters, has been diligent in attendance, never missing a session unless it is due to a doctor's appointment to check his heart ailment or monitor his hearing problems. He is presently reading Barbara Bush's *Millie's Book* and plans to complete all the levels of instruction in the literacy program.

Vince, a husband of forty-four years, a father of three, and a grandfather of seven, never misses an opportunity to promote adult literacy. At every chance meeting, he will candidly explain how he became involved with the Bangor-Pen Argyl adult literacy program. Then, he will go on to solicit your help as a tutor or your enrollment as a student. He attends every new tutor workshop and patiently answers questions. He also takes along his language experience stories to help new tutors practice this method.

As the literacy program's resident grandfather, Vince feels responsible for fellow students, often calling to check on their well-being or arranging transportation for them to attend meetings. He has recently started reading to pre-schoolers and Brownie Girl Scouts. He is proud of his success as an adult literacy student and will do "anything, if it'll help" the literacy program.

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

PROGRAM: *Bangor-Pen Argyl Adult Literacy Program*

SPONSOR: *Jennie Manley and Linda Martin*

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DARLING GREGORY

I'm out of
my box now.
And I want to help
others get out too.

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Although she is thirty-six years old, Darling Gregory did not attend one day of school until she enrolled in classes at the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The youngest of three children born to alcoholic and drug-addicted parents, she was diagnosed as diabetic and perceived herself as a drain on her parents, who often were too drunk to administer her medication.

Darling remembers an abusive father who beat his wife and children and sexually abused her and her older sister. Her mother and father impressed upon her the need to keep the abuse secret from outsiders. She felt a profound sense of relief at being removed from her home by a social worker who had become aware of the family's pattern of neglect and abuse. From age seven to fifteen, Darling, who was placed in a home for abused children, refused to talk to anybody. It was like being imprisoned in a small box from which she struggled to escape. Frequent flashbacks to the abuse convinced Darling to maintain her silence.

She was diagnosed as various times as retarded, paranoid, and schizophrenic. On the basis of these diagnoses, a decision was made not to send her to school. At the age of fifteen, Darling was released from the home and returned to live with her mother and father. But nothing had changed. Soon after her return, her brother got into a violent, knife-wielding argument with her father. Darling fled to a shelter for abused children. Both Darling's older brother and sister committed suicide.

Soon after, her mother divorced her father and remarried. Darling's stepfather, also an alcoholic, caused a car accident from which Darling emerged as a quadriplegic. She also suffers from pulmonary problems, deformities in her hands and wrists, and asthma. Confinement to a string of nursing homes was Darling's fate after the accident.

Although she has lived at institutions for fifteen years, Darling has refused to accept the limitations of her disability. Determined to learn, she enrolled in classes at the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. She has progressed rapidly and, as she gained self-confidence, Darling became a leader in the classroom, helping her fellow students strive for academic achievement. She serves as a role model to other less profoundly disabled students.

Darling plans to attend college for a degree in counseling. She wants to help others who have also faced similar situations. "I'm out of my box, now," she said, "and I want to help other people get out too."

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped*
SPONSOR: *Charles Spruance*

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STEVEN PARKER

People need to emphasize the positive and get on with life.

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Born with cerebral palsy, Steven Parker went to a nursery school for special education children and remained there until he was six. Steven remembers the three years he spent there as a sad time, and one in which he learned very little. He was then placed in a special education class despite the fact that he was not retarded nor emotionally disturbed. When he was nine, Steven's parents were divorced and he was sent to the Reading Rehabilitation Center. There he learned self-help skills along with some "spotty" academic instruction.

When Steven broke his leg at age twelve, it had to be amputated because his bones were simply too brittle to heal. His mother arranged for home tutoring and stressed the importance of literacy but Steven was far too frustrated to try to learn. This frustration turned to grief and anger when his mother and sister died in a fire at their trailer. Steven woke up in the hospital to find himself alone. His father took responsibility for him and placed him in the Elizabethtown Hospital for Children and Youth. He remained there until he was twenty, becoming interested in reading and writing poetry.

In 1976, when Steven moved into Inglis House in Philadelphia, he was deeply introverted and wary of forming relationships. It took six years until he was ready to seek additional schooling. In 1982, he entered the ABE/GED class and something clicked, filling a great emptiness. In 1985, after intensive study, he earned his GED. To date, he has earned 54 credits in an on-site college program and will graduate with an associate degree in the spring of 1991. He has maintained an average of 3.7 and in 1989 was invited to join the Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society.

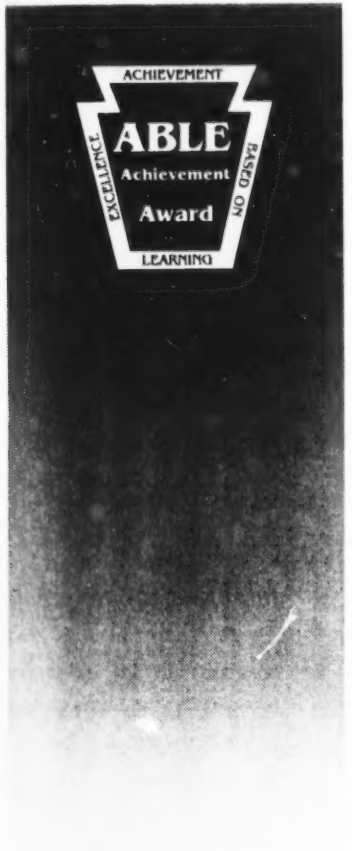
Steven had always been a voracious reader and he found that his breadth of knowledge was in demand by his teachers and fellow students alike. He began to tutor a peer and intends to continue working with her and others after his graduation. He also writes books for children and illustrates them on a computer. His books are even being shared with public schools in a project that emphasizes interaction between able bodied/physically challenged adults and children. Although he is sometimes an angry man, he has learned to use his anger to fuel an honesty and vitality in his writing.

In addition to continuing his peer tutoring, Steven is looking forward to auditing at least one college course per term. He is also determined to continue writing and to someday work toward compiling his poetry in a book.

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Inglis House*
SPONSOR: *Mark Silver*

Champions of Literacy
1991

PATRICIA H. WILLIAMS



There's nothing
in the world
that you can't do
if you really
want to.

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Patricia Williams completed only nine years of school when frustration about her poor reading skills drove her to quit. Hiding the fact that she was a non-reader, she was accepted as having a high school diploma when she began working in 1975. Pat's daughters realized that she wanted to improve her reading and told her about the Susquehanna County Volunteer Literacy Council's tutoring program.

She enrolled in 1987 and was placed at the first level. Pat is still being tutored three times a week, utilizing the skills of two tutors. Her husband has not been as supportive as her daughters. At times he has forbidden her to attend tutoring sessions and she has risked physical and mental abuse to continue with the program.

Shortly after starting the program, Pat was laid off from the job she held for twelve years. Hired by an electronics company, she was required to master their training manual and to take an open book exam. Since the company did not allow the technical manual to leave the site, Pat memorized the vocabulary so that her tutor could use it as a teaching guide. Before the training period was over, she took the open book test and passed it. Since then, she has had several promotions and is now learning to operate a computer in order to advance to a higher position.

Pat's present objective is to get her GED, and go on to college. Following her example, one of her brothers has enrolled in a literacy program. His first written work described what an inspiration Pat has been. She has been interviewed on a local radio station and was presented a special New Reader Award by Mrs. Ellen Casey. In 1989, she was a student representative at a Northeast Regional literacy conference in Bloomsburg. In 1990, she served as a delegate to the Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services and is currently a delegate to the President's Conference on Library and Information Services to be held in Washington in July 1991.

Pat is active in community activities, serving as vice-president of the local Parent-Teacher's Association, as secretary and lecturer for Weight Watchers, as a member of the Christian Mother's Society, and as a fundraiser for the Parent Support Group for Handicapped and Special Children. She was instrumental in establishing a New Readers Support Group and now plans and runs meetings, asking only that the Susquehanna County Volunteer Tutors Literacy Council send meeting notices to other students. As a result of this involvement, she has been attending Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth (TLC) meetings and is a member of the TLC nominating committee.

SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY
PROGRAM: *Susquehanna County Volunteer Literacy Council*
SPONSOR: *Marilyn Potter*

Champions of Literacy
1991

1991 OUTSTANDING ADULT STUDENTS

Left to right, front row; *Darling Gregory, Vincent Luettgen, Deborah Holmes, Steven Parker*

Left to right, back row; *Patricia Williams, Donna Smith, Donald Zeigler, Jr., Michael Murray, Dawn Yates, Carmen Harvison*

Champions of Literacy

1991

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Success Stories: Champions of Literacy
#98-1040 FY 1990-91

ROYCE & ROYCE, INC.
1938 Crooked Oak Drive
Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17601

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